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EGY41415.E

Egypt: Update to EGY33301.E of 15 December 1999 on reports of male and female Christians being forced to convert to Islam and marry Muslims
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

No information on male and female Christians being forced to convert to Islam and marry Muslims could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

However, while not identifying the reasons for the conversion, various documents refer to the forced conversion of Christians in Egypt (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, sec. 2c; *National Review* 3 Dec. 2001; AAP 28 June 2001; US 7 Sept. 2000; Freedom House 16 Mar. 1999; Jubilee Campaign 23 Feb. 1999). Two documents reported that young Christian women were being pressured to convert to Islam (*National Review* 3 Dec. 2001; Federal News Service 7 Sept. 2000). The Middle East Research Director of the Centre for Religious Freedom, Freedom House, testified in September 2000 that women and girls were being targeted by "extremist Muslim groups" and pressured, at times with the cooperation of local police, to convert to Islam (ibid.).

Based on information obtained from the Cairo-based Center for Human Rights for National Unity, a March 1999 Freedom House news release reported on the forced conversion of a 16-year old Coptic girl (Freedom House 16 Mar. 1999). As well as containing the brother's account of the girl's abduction, the news release goes on to note that Freedom House had investigated a number of cases in Egypt in which young Christian girls had been taken by Muslim men and forcibly converted to Islam, in many instances with the cooperation of local police (ibid.). Referring to its April 1999 report entitled *Egypt's Endangered Christians*, the press release indicated that Freedom House found that "vulnerable Christian women and girls are one of the primary targets of Muslim militants who are determined to transform Egypt by force into a fundamentalist Islamic state" (ibid.). The report also notes that the militants pressure young girls to convert, at times offering financial incentives and at others using abduction or coercion (ibid.).

Similarly, a 23 February 1999 Jubilee Campaign press release, describing several of the methods reportedly employed by Islamic extremists to convert Egyptian Christians to Islam, states that a "wide variety of methods, including force and financial incentives" are used. As described on its Website, the Jubilee Campaign is a "human rights pressure group, lobbying to protect children's rights and the persecuted church" (n.d.).

Two reports issued by Compass Direct news service reported on the conversion of a Christian man under questionable circumstances (Compass Direct 8 June 2001; ibid. 4 May 2001). According to the reports, Dr. Hanna Kamal Hanna Morgan, who reportedly suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, was converted to Islam while being treated at hospital (ibid.). Morgan's wife filed a lawsuit attempting to invalidate her husband's certificate of conversion to Islam, which was issued under the auspices of Al-Azhar, a centre of Islamic learning and "the highest Muslim authority in Egypt" (ibid. 8 June 2001). The case was originally brought before a lower court which refused to hear it, arguing that the man's conversion had automatically dissolved his Christian marriage, thereby voiding any "legal relation" between the two and disallowing the wife to open such a case (ibid.).

In June 2001, Morgan himself filed a court case seeking custody of the couple's two daughters (ibid. 8 June 2001). According to Islamic law in Egypt, a Muslim father automatically retains custody of his minor children (ibid.). Morgan's new Muslim identity papers also lists his daughters as Muslims (ibid.).

For further information on the forced conversion of Christians in Egypt, please refer to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2002*.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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